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SUBJECT: CENSUS DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN MARS AFTERMATH OF SUDAN  
ELECTION LAW APPROVAL

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Recent stories in the Sudanese press purporting to present "preliminary census results" are a fabrication, with no basis in fact. Post has confirmed with the local UNFP office, heavily involved in the entire census process, that scanning of the raw census data has not even begun, so no preliminary figures exist.

Individuals close to the SPLM are viewing the misleading newspaper stories, using completely fabricated data, as a "media blitz" being mounted by pro-NCP media outlets and journalists. These sources suspect the disinformation campaign is designed to sour prospects for intra-Presidency discussions set for later this week. The Government of Southern Sudan has issued public statements aiming to calm southern outrage in the face of media reports that put the South's population below even 1983 levels. SPLM insiders and staffers within the GOSS Presidency claim the move is indicative of continued NCP unease about forthcoming elections, and reflects an attempt by them to stall meaningful discussions on Abyei-related issues. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On July 8, the rabidly anti-SPLM Arabic newspaper Al Sahafa published what it claimed were "authorized census figures" endorsed by the national Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) that placed the South's population at 10 million. Deputy Secretary General Anne Itto, dismissed the publication as a "laughable intimidation tactic." She commented that "the use of presumably dated figures only demonstrates Khartoum's return to tried-and-true tactics of disinformation and misinformation."

UNFP DISMISSES NEWS REPORTS AS FALSE  
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4. (SBU) Jimmy Musok, Sudan representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFP), laughed when told by Embassy Poloff of the newspaper stories. "I can categorically say that those articles are not true," he said. He explained that the scanning of raw census data will not even begin until August 1, making it unlikely that any preliminary census results will be available before the end of 2008.

5. (SBU) Southern Sudan Commission for the Census and Statistical Evaluation (SSCCSE) Chairman Isaiah Chol was more heated on the subject. Reached by ConGen Poloff July 8, he asserted that it was impossible to obtain any results from the census this early in 2008.

Both the SSCCSE and CBS were still retrieving completed census forms from collections centers throughout the South. UNMIS/Juba confirmed that the only forms delivered to the census processing center in Rumbek thus far were those for the four states of the greater Bahr el Ghazal region. Additional intra-South deliveries have been stalled by President Bashir's decree grounding Russian aircraft in Sudan.

6. (SBU) First notified of the press reporting by ConGen staff on July 8 (Al Sahafa is not circulated in Rumbek) SSCCSE Chairman Chol and his deputy expressed "absolute disbelief" at the media reporting, and demanded to know the source of the data. On July 9, Chol held a press conference denouncing the articles, and calling

for a similar statement by his national counterparts at CBS. Chol rejected the press reports, noting the figures do not reflect the South's growth since the 2005 signing of the CPA (substantiated by the 2007 Household Health Survey conducted jointly by CBS and the SSCCSE), nor do they match up against the number of forms distributed by census enumeration teams. (NOTE: CBS has not yet released a statement in response to the press stories. Embassy has not been able to reach contacts at CBS. END NOTE)

17. (SBU) COMMENT: While it is far too early to know that the census results may be, even UNFPA mapping put the South at twenty percent of Sudan's population, while the SPLM contends it is at

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least thirty percent. We are unsure whether to blame low professional journalistic standards or political dirty tricks for the census misinformation campaign. If the intent was to rile SPLM members and sow even more distrust between the SPLM and the NCP, the campaign certainly pushed the right buttons. The disinformation confirms the fears of SPLM members who have long insisted that the NCP will stop at nothing to ensure that Southern Sudan's population is significantly under-reported in the census, possibly resulting in an under-representation in the National Assembly - if accepted by both parties. The more likely outcome is that the result will be less than what the SPLM would like (whether accurate or not), and the SPLM will reject the result and negotiate a continuation of the current status quo.

FERNANDEZ